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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [HR](#)

SUBJECT: ETHNIC SERBS VOTE FOR MODERATES

REF: A. ZAGREB 2463

[¶](#)B. ZAGREB 2365

Classified By: POLOFF Mitch benedict for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d)

Summary

[¶](#)1. (U) With the official vote count still days away, moderate Serbs from the Independent Democratic Serbian Party (SDSS) are almost certain to fill the three designated ethnic Serb seats in the next Parliament. Milan Djukic, the confrontational former representative of ethnic Serbs in Parliament, lost narrowly to a relatively unknown newcomer on the national scene, and will not return to Parliament. Ethnic Serbs appear to have decided that extremist politics have not been successful, and the SDSS will face high expectations that they can solve intractable and long-term problems faced by the Serbian community. End Summary.

A Clean Sweep by the SDSS

[¶](#)2. (U) One of the surprises to come out of the November 23 Parliamentary elections is that the Independent Democratic Serbian Party (SDSS) appears to have captured all three of the guaranteed seats for the Serbian minority in the next parliament. With results in from all but six of 6,504 polling stations (99.9 percent), the SDSS's candidates placed first, second, and third on the minority list. Vojislav Stanimirovic, the party President, was first with 24,361 votes (22.16 percent) and Milorad Pupovac, vice president of SDSS, came in second with 23,541 votes (21.41 percent). The biggest upset of all was Ratko Gajica, the SDSS's third candidate and a relative unknown outside of Knin, who beat Milan Djukic, President of the Serbian National Party, by approximately 700 votes. In the last Parliamentary election in January 2000, Djukic beat Pupovac by 3,000 votes and was the minority Serbian representative in the 2000-2003 parliament, which had only one guaranteed minority seat reserved for Serbs.

A Political Newcomer

[¶](#)3. (U) Gajica, whose birthday was election day, started the campaign as a relative unknown outside of Knin. A lawyer by training, he is an SDSS representative in the Sibenik-Knin County Assembly, and the President of the Sibenik-Knin Serbian National Minority Council. His prominence among Serbs in the Knin region may partly be due to the fact he stayed in Knin during and after Croatian forces recaptured the town in Operation "Storm" in 1995. He maintained a private law practice, and has consistently provided pro bono legal assistance to ethnic Serbs. Though never mentioned by name directly, in campaign appearances Gajica contrasted his calm and reasoned style, and ability to work successfully within the system, with that of Djukic. Stanimirovic and Pupovac both worked to provide Gajica with maximum exposure among the electorate. The three candidates appeared together at almost all campaign functions across Croatia, and Gajica was featured in press releases and campaign propaganda distributed in Serbia and Montenegro.

Djukic Ousted

[¶](#)4. (C) Djukic, on the other hand, appears to have antagonized just about everyone. An OSCE observer termed his performance on the campaign trail "atrocious." He campaigned almost exclusively on his home turf of Donji Lapac and Donji Srb. However, his rallies were poorly attended -- at times only a handful of people turned out. Bombastic and exclusionary, Djukic's style is to make an extreme statement that will draw a reaction from a high-level Government official, often ensuring prominent press coverage. Few if any legislative accomplishments could be credited to Djukic; he even voted against the dual vote for ethnic minorities (Ref B), a position seemingly at odds with a large majority of ethnic Serbs. Drazen Djakula, the President of the non-partisan Serb Democratic Forum (SDF), told us after the election that Djukic's ouster from parliament indicates minorities

recognize that extremist positions are not productive in terms of advancing minority interests. Djukic might get headlines, but ethnic Serbs appear to agree that he did not deserve to get their vote.

Comment

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15. (C) The SDSS will enter Parliament with a strong mandate from ethnic Serbs, and they are going to be under tremendous pressure to produce. Time is running out (hostilities ended eight years ago, and Eastern Slavonia was reincorporated into Croatia six years ago), and expectations are going to be high for the SDSS to achieve concrete results on immediate issues, such as property and tenancy/occupancy rights, and on long-term and more systemic problems, such as employment and job creation. The SDSS was elected both on name recognition -- Stanimirovic due to his role with Erdut processes in Eastern Slavonia, Pupovac as a former Member of Parliament (1995-1999) and Zagreb-based activist, and Gajica in Knin -- as well as for successfully conveying the message that they can work within parliament to produce meaningful results. The day after elections they reached out to the other five minority representatives, and they plan to meet soon to discuss what role they can play in promoting their issues in the next government's mandate.

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